Paul’s use of Malachi 1:2–3 in Romans 9:13

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“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” (Mal. 1:2–3 ESV)

As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Rom. 9:13 ESV)

## 1. Context of Romans 9:13

* Broader context of Romans (see outline from Moo[[1]](#footnote-21))
* Genre and structure of Romans 9
  + Seifrid sees Romans 9 as diatribe encapsulated by lament:
  + Paul’s opening lament provides the conceptual framework for the entire discourse, including the closing hymn of praise, which, according to the pattern of the psalms of lament, reaffirms the hope of the promises, contrary to all outward appearances (e.g., Pss. 10; 13; 22; 60; 102). The first section of Paul’s discourse (9:1–29) here is oriented around lament, which appears at the opening and closing (9:1–5, 27–29). Paul’s intervening instruction, which takes the form of diatribe, is essential to that lament, which otherwise would degenerate into unbelieving despair or a simplistic blaming of Israel.[[2]](#footnote-22)
  + This sounds attractive, but seems forced.
    - There are few structural indications of an inclusio. Romans 9:27–29 fits more closely with Rom. 9:24–26.
    - The supposed laments lack a direct appeal to God, and are not in the form of a prayer. Indeed, the text seems to be addressed directly to Paul’s audience along the lines of diatribe.
  + As diatribe, 9:1–5 introduces the problem, verses 6–13 introduce a principle that helps to address the problem, and verses 14–23 respond to a logical objection introduced by that principle.
  + Romans 9:13 supports the principle articulated in 9:6, 8.

## 2. Context of Malachi 1:2–3

### Introduction

* Malachi was highly regarded by early Christians and Jews for its conclusive message. Tertullian saw it as the link between Judaism and Christianity, while ancient Jews called it “the seal of the Prophets” and “the last among them.”[[3]](#footnote-25)
* Consists of messages delivered by a postexilic Palestinian prophet, though some question as to the exact identity of the author of the text. No reason to believe the original speaker was not named Malachi, though someone else may have written down his oracles.[[4]](#footnote-26)
* Structure: “Malachi is comprised of a superscription and six prophetic disputation speeches, the last of which may also contain a summary challenge related to the message of the book as a whole.” (Stuart[[5]](#footnote-27))
* The main themes (keep the Law and prepare for the Day of the Lord) are visible in the concluding summary:
* “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5”Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." (Mal. 4:4-6 ESV)
* In keeping with the emphasis on the Law, Malachi includes many passages pronouncing curses which reflect the Torah cursings.[[6]](#footnote-28)

### Immediate context

* Occurs in the first speech: Mal. 1:2–5
* “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob 3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” 4 If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the LORD of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.’ ” 5 Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!” (Malachi 1:2–5 ESV)
* Summary from Stuart:[[7]](#footnote-30)
* “An oracle against Edom, showing God’s covenant love and power and his distinction between the good (seen in his faithfulness to his covenant love for Israel) and the wicked (seen in his international power via his judgment on one of Israel’s key enemies, Edom).” (p. 1249)
* Based on occurrences in other prophetic texts, it is possible to read Edom “as a synecdoche for Israel’s enemies in general.”[[8]](#footnote-31)

### Love/hate

* God’s love for Israel relates to election (Deut. 7:6–8) and redemption (Deut. 4:34, 37; 7:8; 33:2–3; Hos. 11:1).[[9]](#footnote-33)
* God’s hatred for Esau is contrary to normal social convention.[[10]](#footnote-34)
* God’s feelings toward both are not a function of their moral standing. He is completely sovereign both in his loving and his hating.[[11]](#footnote-35)
* We should not equate God’s love and hate with human psychology.[[12]](#footnote-36)
* Verhoef:
* “The message of Malachi in this connection is in accordance with the testimony of Isa. 34–35 and 63:1–6, and of Ezek. 35–36. In Isa. 34–35 the prophecy of Israel’s restoration as a nation is connected with the eschatological depiction of Edom’s destruction. God’s vengeance on Edom and his deliverance of Israel are interrelated on his ‘day,’ according to Isa. 63:1–6. The same vision on the relationship between Israel’s restoration and Edom’s destruction is found in Ezek. 35–36.”[[13]](#footnote-37)
* Stuart notes that this text is not to give “words of assurance to a psychologically insecure Israel who needs to know that God still cares,” and that neither should we personalize the application of this text. God’s care is taught elsewhere.[[14]](#footnote-38)
* Further, the language of “love” and “hate” was used by kings in speaking of foreign alliances with no reference to personal feelings.[[15]](#footnote-39)

## 3. Early Jewish exegesis of Malachi 1

I’m sure this step would yield fruitful insights, yet I remain unacquainted with these sources. Unless the commentaries direct me in useful directions here, this is beyond the scope of what I know.

## 4. Textual factors

In the Greek, there are a few significant textual factors, most of which do not affect interpretation.

Paul’s quotation varies the word order slightly from the text passed down to us by the Septuagint of Malachi:

Rom. 9:13 καθὼς γέγραπται· τὸν Ἰακὼβ ἠγάπησα, τὸν δὲ Ἠσαῦ ἐμίσησα.   
Mal. 1:2-3 καὶ ἠγάπησα τὸν Ιακωβ τὸν δὲ Ησαυ ἐμίσησα

Apparently, Paul fronts the noun “Jacob” for emphasis, whereas the Septuagint reproduces the chiastic order of the Hebrew text. This could be seen as Paul emphasizing Jacob’s role, while Malachi is more interested in the comparison/contrast of the pair.

The Greek text from the Septuagint faithfully renders the underlying Hebrew, which reads as follows:



Perhaps some distinction could be made based on verb aspect between the Qal waw-consecutive imperfect *wa’ohav* (*yictol* form) referring to Jacob and the Qal perfect *sanethi* (*qatalti* form) referring to Esau. Yet none of the English translations do so.

The Greek text of Romans 9:13 includes two minor variants that are worth mentioning and two that are not worth mentioning:

1. **καθως** “just as”: All texts read καθως, except for Westcott-Hort and Vaticanus who read the synonym καθαπερ. This term occurs in Paul’s introductory formula, not the quotation.
2. **εμισησα** “hated”: Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and Boernerianus read εμεισησα. The most significant witness to the reading with epsilon-iota dipthong is P46. This apparent misspelling is otherwise rare, and so only the Tyndale House GNT preserves this reading in its primary text. NA28, UBS, and SBLGNT do not mention the variant in their apparatuses. Whichever spelling is accepted, the form remains aorist active first person singular from μισέω “hate.”
3. According to the CNTTS apparatus, several spellings of the proper nouns for Jacob and Esau occur.

## 5. How Paul uses Malachi 1 in Romans 9:13

Seifrid: “The prophetic announcement “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” is intended to open Israel’s eyes. Paul’s appeal to the text implies that the pattern has been repeated in his day. God in freedom has set his love on some within Israel, but not on others."[[16]](#footnote-44)

## 6. Paul’s theological use

The contrastive language is equally, maybe moreso, difficult to interpret here. The background question is whether this is a text for something like the “doctrine of reprobation,” or more charitably “double predestination.”

Schreiner has some interesting thoughts here:

Does the text suggest double predestination? Apparently it does. We need to remember that in the Pauline view predestination never lessened human responsibility (cf. Rom. 1:18–3:20; 9:30–10:21), and the correlation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is ultimately a mystery that is beyond our finite comprehension. We dare not conclude that human decisions are a charade, insignificant, or trivial. But we must also beware of a rationalizing expedient that domesticates the text by exalting human freedom so that it fits neatly into our preconceptions. Dunn (1988b: 545) worries that an admission of double predestination will lead to pride on the part of those selected and that it diminishes the wonder of those elected. The first warning is salutary… But his latter objection is off the mark. It increases wonder for believers to realize they have been chosen and others have not, especially since the choice was irrespective of their works. …

Once again many scholars insist that this passage does not relate to individual salvation but only to the temporal destiny of nations since Jacob and Esau represent two peoples (Gen. 25:23) and their historical destiny. But again this view ignores the fact that the issue in the context of Rom. 9 relates to the salvation of the Jews, and a discussion of historical destiny apart from salvation is irrelevant to the issue that called forth this discussion. …

**I have argued that the issue in the context of Romans is salvation even if the OT texts about Esau and his descendants merely concern their temporal destiny.**Some scholars contend that there is every indication that Esau was saved because he was blessed by Isaac (Gen. 27:39–40), he was reconciled to Jacob (Gen. 33), his genealogy was included in Gen. 36 (cf. 1 Chron. 1), and Israel is forbidden to abhor him since he is a brother (Deut. 23:7; cf. Amos 2:1–3; see, e.g., Cranfield 1979: 480; W. Campbell 1981a: 29; Blomberg 1987: 109–16; Morris 1988: 353). This is a possible reading of the OT but not the most probable. This evidence is not as impressive at it first appears. The blessing received from Isaac (Gen. 27:39–40) is bleak and gives no indication of spiritual participation in the promises. The reconciliation to Jacob and the genealogies are not decisive. In Deut. 23:7 Israel is exhorted not to hate Egyptians either, but this is no indication of their spiritual state. Esau is presented as a wicked person because he despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob (Gen. 25:29–34), and through the sovereignty of God the blessing of Abraham was transmitted to Jacob instead of to Esau (Gen. 27). **We have already seen that Mal. 1:2–5 confirms the idea that Edomites were outside the people of God, and this text does not seem to relate only to temporal displeasure since it says that Yahweh’s “anger” upon them is “forever” (Mal. 1:4).** Indeed, even in the OT, Edom virtually functions as a type of a nation that will experience God’s wrath (see Isa. 34; 63:1–6; Jer. 49:7–22; Ezek. 25:12–14; Amos 1:11–12; Obadiah). Most Jews in Paul’s time would have understood the Edomites to be unsaved as well. For example, in Gen. 27:39–40 the blessing of Esau concludes with the words that Esau “shall break his [Jacob’s] yoke from your neck”; but Jubilees adds, “and then you will surely sin completely unto death, and your seed will be rooted out from under heaven” (Jub. 26.34 [Wintermute, OTP 2:107]; cf. also 1 Enoch 89.11–12; Jub. 29.14–20; 35.9, 13–17; 37.1–38.24; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 3:16; Odeberg, TDNT 1:605).[[17]](#footnote-46)

1. Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey.* Second edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
2. Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 638. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
3. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
4. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
5. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
6. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
7. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
8. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
9. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
10. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
11. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
12. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
13. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
14. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
15. Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,* ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 3, The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
16. Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 638. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
17. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, vol. 6, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 501–503. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)